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Publication rates for abstracts presented at the British Association of Plastic Surgeons meetings: how do we compare with other specialties?

D. W. Oliver, I. S. Whitaker* and D. P. K. Chohan†

Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, The Radcliffe Infirmary, University of Oxford, Oxford; and

*Department of Clinical Anatomy, and †Addenbrooke's Hospital Clinical School, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

SUMMARY. We present a retrospective study of the publication rates of articles presented to five meetings of the British Association of Plastic Surgeons between 1995 and 1999. The PubMed database (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>) was searched using the presenter's name and key words from the abstract. Publication rates varied from 23% for the Winter Meeting of 1999 to 54% for the Winter Meeting of 1997. The mean time lag from presentation to publication varied between 13 and 25 months (range: 1–46 months). These results are comparable to those found in some other medical specialties. © 2003 The British Association of Plastic Surgeons. Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: surgical specialties, abstract, publication rates.

Publication of papers after peer review allows the dissemination of information and stimulates new ideas in medicine and science. Presentation of data to meetings prompts questions, discussion and feedback from the audience. Subsequent publication depends on the merit of the work, as judged by the editor of the journal after peer review by experts in that field. Papers presented to the British Association of Plastic Surgeons (BAPS) are selected on the basis of the submitted abstract. This abstract is not as complete a source of data as the entire article. Not all presentations are original unpublished work. Some presentations aim to illustrate a surgical technique or report a clinical case of special interest, and are not submitted for publication. It is impossible to ascertain how many of the presented papers were actually submitted for publication; therefore, data is presented as a percentage of all presentations. We did not find duplication of work in different journals. We undertook this study to ascertain the rates of publication after presentation (not including poster presentations) and discuss the implications of these findings.

Methods

All abstracts presented at one of the following five BAPS meetings—Winter 1995, Summer 1997, Winter 1997, Winter 1998 and Winter 1999—were identified retrospectively from conference programmes. In order to determine whether the work had been published, the PubMed database (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>) was searched using each of the presenter's names and key words from the abstract. From the

results of this search it was possible to check that the abstract of the paper and the abstract from the meeting contained the same or similar data and represented the same work. The date and journal of publication were noted, as was the category of paper from the meeting programme. Publication rates for work presented at BAPS meetings were compared to published publication rates from the literature.

Results

Publication rates varied from 23% (Winter 1999) to 54% (Winter 1997). We accept that there may be a small number of papers still being prepared for publication, even after this time, for the more recent meetings. The publication rates in the *British Journal of Plastic Surgery* ranged from 9% (Winter 1995 and Winter 1999) to 18% (Summer 1997). Table 1 shows the publication rates and the mean times to publication for each meeting. Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the publication rates for each meeting. Figure 2 shows the publication rates for other specialties, obtained from published data. The overall publication rate for these five BAPS meetings was 32% (118/370).

In addition to the *British Journal of Plastic Surgery*, journals publishing work presented to BAPS meetings include *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, *Annals of Plastic Surgery*, the *European Journal of Plastic Surgery* and the *Journal of Hand Surgery*. We did not find any differences between papers presented in different sessions of the meetings or between main and parallel sessions. Nor was there any significant difference in publication

Table 1 Publication rates and mean time to publication for each meeting

	Winter 1995	Summer 1997	Winter 1997	Winter 1998	Winter 1999
total number of papers	56	48	54	107	105
total publications	17 (30%)	15 (31%)	29 (54%)	33 (31%)	24 (23%)
published in the <i>British Journal of Plastic Surgery</i>	5 (9%)	9 (19%)	9 (17%)	15 (14%)	9 (9%)
published in other journals	12 (21%)	6 (12%)	20 (37%)	18 (17%)	15 (14%)
mean time to publication (months)	19	25	19	13	16
range of publication times (months)	3–46	3–42	1–46	1–28	1–26

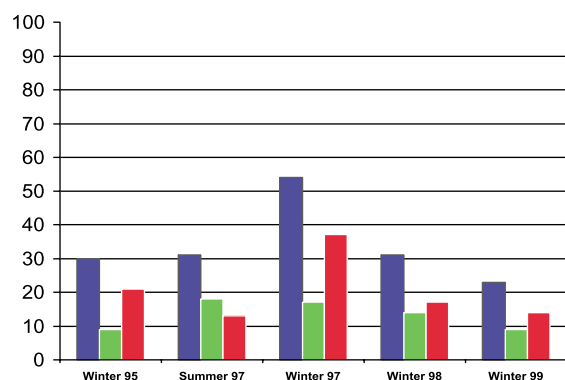
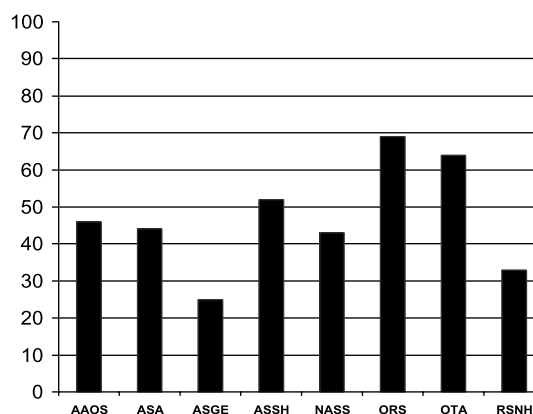
rate between clinical papers and scientific/research-based papers.

Discussion

Publication rates for some other specialties are available from published data and range from 25% (American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy)¹ to 69% (Otorhinolaryngological Research Society).² Results from similar studies in other specialties are shown in Figure 2. The overall publication rate for these five BAPS meetings was 32% (118/370). This compares with the mean publication rate for these eight other specialties of 50%.

The published literature gives mean delays from presentation to publication of 15 months³ to 23 months.² Most publications were published within 3 years of presentation. We accept, therefore, that there may be a small number of papers yet to be published from the more recent meetings studied. Only one study showed an increase in publication rates for scientific papers (American Society for Surgery of the Hand), with an ultimate publication rate of 52% and a distinct trend towards higher ultimate publication rates (74%) for research-based abstracts.⁴

In other surgical specialties such as orthopaedics, the abstracts presented to the scientific meetings organised

**Figure 1**—Publication rates as percentages of the total number of papers presented at each meeting (blue: total publications; green: publications in the *British Journal of Plastic Surgery*; red: publications in other journals).**Figure 2**—Total percentage publication rates for other specialty meetings, obtained from published data (AAOS: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons;⁵ ASA: American Society of Anesthesiologists;⁶ ASGE: American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy;² ASSH: American Society for Surgery of the Hand;⁴ NASS: North American Spine Society;⁷ ORS: Otorhinolaryngological Research Society;¹ OTA: Orthopaedic Trauma Association;⁸ and RSNH: Radiological Society of North America³).

by orthopaedic associations are published as abstracts in supplements to their journals. We believe that this may have a detrimental effect on subsequent publication, because some authors may accept publication of an abstract and not subsequently submit the same material for publication in full. It must also be recognised that many papers are from specialist registrars and senior house officers whose primary aim is to publish original work in order to obtain a reference for their curriculum vitae.

We have shown that the publication rate for work presented at BAPS meetings is lower than all but one of the published publication rates for other specialties, even when abstracts are published in supplements to the specialty journals.

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The Authors**David W. Oliver**

Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, The Radcliffe Infirmary, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK.

Iain S. Whitaker

Department of Clinical Anatomy, University of Cambridge, The Evelyn Hospital, Cambridge CB2 2AF, UK.

Deepak P. K. Chohan

Addenbrooke's Hospital Clinical School, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Correspondence to Dr I. S. Whitaker

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